



# Fire Season 2005

Greetings to our community neighbors! The fire and fuels management program in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks would like to take this opportunity to report on what was accomplished during fire season 2005.

**Unplanned Fires:** As always, the parks took preventive steps to reduce accidental fires. Due to the wet winter, fire restrictions were instituted a little later than normal, from early August until mid-October. Only seven human-caused fires occurred all season and, because of the parks' quick response, these fires burned less than one acre.

Like last year, limited storm activity over the summer produced fewer lightning-caused fires than average. Out of only eighteen lightning

starts, fourteen fires were allowed to spread naturally as *wildland fire use* projects to maintain forest diversity and health. The other four fires were suppressed.

While most of the lightning fires remained small (approximately one acre), two grew together to become the 9,775-acre Comb Fire just north of the Cedar Grove area (see box below). Because it burned on both sides of the agency boundary, the fire was managed by both the National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service. On August 20, the Fresno Bee did a feature story describing this interagency cooperation and calling the Comb fire "a friend to nature."

**Planned Projects:** The parks finished nine

- Continued

## "Sizing-Up" the Comb Fire

This summer, the lightning-caused Comb Fire became the second-largest wildland fire managed to improve forest conditions in the history of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks. The Comb Fire "beat out" the 7,963-acre West Kern Fire which occurred in 2003. The largest fire ever managed by these parks as a natural fire was the 10,418-acre Ferguson Fire in 1977.

The Comb Fire started on July 22 and burned 9,775 acres over three months. The fire reduced dead and down vegetation on the forest floor, stimulated new growth, and created diverse habitats for wildlife. Located just north of the Cedar Grove area, the Comb Fire was visible to many park visitors who showed amazing support and interest.

All of the "Top 3" fires mentioned above were located in the southern part of Kings Canyon National Park. This is not a coincidence. The Sugarloaf Valley and the Lewis

Creek drainage have hosted regular lightning fires for thousands of years. The frequency of fires here has kept ground fuels low and protected the forest from high-intensity blazes. The good news is that the National Park Service allows this natural fire cycle to continue today.

How long will this "Top 3" ranking last? No one knows for sure, but the list itself doesn't really matter. The main goal of the fire program is to maintain fire's natural presence on the landscape, not to have fires of any particular size.



Park ranger talks with visitors about the Comb Fire located on the ridge above their campground.

"Working in the parks this summer was a great experience," says Brown. "Crew 91 members, Mike Brown and April Deming, still have high spirits after a long fire season."



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## Fire Season Events 2005



From her lookout across the canyon, fire monitor Jayleen Lineback tracks the Comb Fire.

### March

- Part of Lewis Creek Prescribed Fire completed in Cedar Grove area

### May

- Roads End Prescribed Fire completed in Cedar Grove area

### June

- Ash Mountain prescribed burns started
- Grant "G" Prescribed Fire completed

### July

- Mechanical fuel reduction project completed around the community of Silver City
- Grant "E" Prescribed Fire completed
- Lightning-caused Comb Fire began

### August

- Remaining portion of Lewis Creek Prescribed Fire burned in the Comb Fire

### September

- Quarry Prescribed Fire completed in Giant Forest area
- Grant West Prescribed Fire completed (segments I and II)

### October

- Highbridge Prescribed Fire completed in Mineral King area
- Highbridge East Prescribed Fire started

### November

- Highbridge East Prescribed Fire completed

### Comments or Questions?

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of the eleven prescribed fire projects that were planned for this year. Since conditions were not right for the final two projects (Upper Redwood and Cabin Meadow), fire staff substituted a project slated for next year. The ten burns totaled 5,042 acres. One project occurred in Ash Mountain, two in Mineral King, one in Giant Forest, four in Grant Grove, and two in Cedar Grove.

The parks also completed mechanical fuel reduction work around the communities of Silver City and Wilsonia. Excess brush and small trees were cut to create defensible space and reduce wildfire risk. Crews will burn the

piles of vegetation from these projects over the winter.

**Uncertain End to Fire Season:** As you read this newsletter after the holidays, we hope you will be looking up at snow-capped peaks, but it is possible that it will still be warm and dry. Since the parks' fire season is not over as this newsletter goes to the printer, there may be some fire activity during the month of December that is not reported here.

At the time of this writing, several lightning-caused fires are burning in the parks that started during a late-October storm. The

largest is the Kern Fire which is over 200 acres. If current dry conditions persist, fire managers may consider igniting the 441-acre Cabin Meadow Prescribed Fire near Dorst Campground in December.

As events progress, we will continue to share information through community emails, bulletin boards, our website, and the media. If you would like to be on our community email list, please contact us via the phone or email listed above.

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks wish you a very happy new year!